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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE ON ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT AND  
GAZA "FACT FINDING" REPORT

Classified By: Counselor Catherine Hill-Herndon  
Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Key points:

-- In a May 11 meeting, Arab League (AL) Chief of Staff Hisham Yousef told us that AL SYG Moussa was very encouraged by the Administration's early position on Middle East peace. He said that the AL had agreed to resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations only if Israel satisfactorily halts settlement activity, but told us that some Arabs may agree to a more pragmatic Arab approach.

-- Yousef warned that opening the Arab Peace Initiative up for discussion at the AL now would be "disastrous," given that several Arab states want to scuttle the initiative. That said, he understood the need for creative thinking on options for "operationalizing" the API.

-- In a separate May 10 briefing for local diplomats, Yousef reported that the AL May 7 ministerial had focused on "steps to revive the peace process," addressing Israeli settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem, and the AL fact-finding report on Gaza. The Arab League wants the U.N Security Council to address Israeli "violations of international law."

-- Yousef argued in both meetings that Iran should not be used as a "diversion" to Israeli-Palestinian core issues, and ongoing Palestinian discord is "no excuse" for inaction.

12. (C) Arab League COS Hisham Yousef told us May 11 that the Arab League consensus (as publicly stated) was that "concrete steps" by Israel on settlements is a pre-condition for Arab support of resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The general Arab view is that the Israelis should make a strong, convincing announcement on settlement policy that could be verified on the ground. However, he told us privately that some (unspecified) Arab leaders would be willing to adopt a more flexible approach, driven largely by their confidence in the Administration's early position on Middle East peace.

13. (C) Yousef offered his personal concern that Arab pressure for Israeli action on settlements would result in the process bogging down, as Israel and the U.S. would end up haggling on terms and conditions ad infinitum. He said he understood the idea of using the API as a foundation to base Arab steps toward recognition of Israel, but warned that opening the API for discussion on the Arab League floor would be "disastrous," given the bloc of states (led by Qatar and Syria) that would seek to cancel, or expedite expiration of, the API. For now, Yousef said that the plan is for the AL to evaluate the API by the end of 2009.

14. (C) Yousef said that Arab leaders believe that Israel is using Iran as "leverage" in the Israeli-Palestinian context,

and opined that while progress on the Iran file would have a positive impact on the environment for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the converse was not true, i.e. progress on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would not positively impact the international community's impasse with Iran.

¶5. (U) In the May 10 briefing with local diplomats, Yousef reported that the AL May 7 ministerial had focused on "steps to revive the peace process," addressing Israeli settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem, and the AL "independent" fact-finding report on Gaza, entitled "No Safe Place". This report had determined that both Israel and Hamas had engaged in indiscriminate attacks on civilians (note: The 250 page report can be found in English on the Arab League website at [www.ArabLeagueonline.org](http://www.ArabLeagueonline.org)). However, the bulk of the report's conclusions were focused on Israeli transgressions.

¶6. (U) Yousef told the local diplomats that the Arab League would present the report to the U.N. and call on the Security Council to address "violations of international law" during the Gaza crisis. Yousef said that the report suggested various forums for legal action against Israel, including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court and/or within justice systems of individual states under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

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